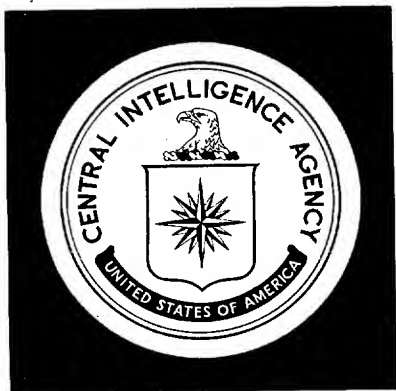


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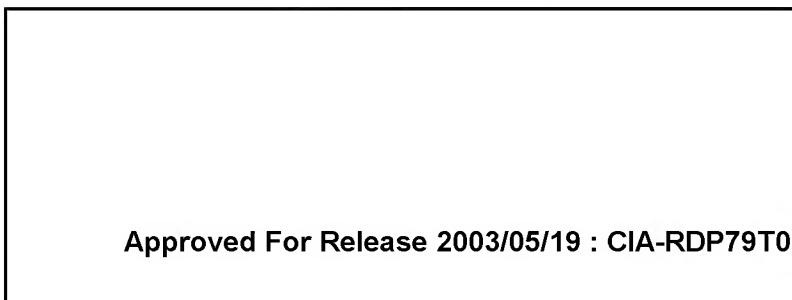
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THAILAND: Leadership said to be ready to return to a quasi-constitutional government. (Page 5)

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THAILAND: Some progress may have been made on the question of a return to a quasi-constitutional structure of government.

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General Praphat has now agreed to return to a cabinet system before the end of March. If so, this would represent at least a partial victory for Thanom in what has increasingly appeared to be a losing fight to maintain his leadership. Praphat, who has strengthened his position at Thanom's expense since the abrogation of the constitution last November, previously had opposed the issuance of an interim constitution and the formation of a new cabinet. Thanom may have undercut Praphat's stand by appealing to King Phumiphon who favors a return to quasi-constitutional rule in order to legitimize his own position.

As things now stand, there would be little change in the leadership of the government if the current National Executive Council were disbanded in favor of a new cabinet.

The larger question of Thanom's future status is still not clear, however. He reportedly is assured the prime ministership in any new government, but some military leaders may be annoyed if Thanom further delays his overdue retirement as supreme commander of the armed forces.

A decision on a new governmental setup might bring a greater sense of direction in Bangkok. The dismissal of parliament was carried out for the expressed purpose of increasing the efficiency and vigor with which Thailand could address its problems. But since their "take-over" two and a half months ago, Thailand's military leaders have spent much of their time and energy in jockeying for position rather than focusing the government's attention on the country's problems, such as insurgency.

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